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## BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON DOPING

“I don’t know if I would report them”: Student-athletes’ thoughts, feelings and anticipated behaviours on blowing the whistle on doping in sport.

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## Abstract

Revisions to global anti-doping policy and growing evidence of systematic doping in sport means athletes and athlete support personnel are increasingly encouraged to ‘blow the whistle’ on doping. Yet, individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and anticipated behaviours in reporting wrongdoing of this kind are unknown, hindering its promotion. To inform current anti-doping efforts, this study explored student-athletes’ anticipated behaviours relative to blowing the whistle on performance enhancing drug (PED) use and their underpinning attitudes. *Design:* Qualitative methodology. *Method:* Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 track and field university student-athletes from the UK (N = 14) and US (N = 14). Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. *Results:* Addressing doping presents a true moral dilemma and is not a dichotomous process whereby athletes either report doping or do nothing. Instead, four options for addressing others’ PED use emerged: (1) confront PED user directly, (2) report to ‘someone’, (3) report to anti-doping ‘authorities’, or (4) ignore the behaviour. Underpinned by relational concerns and empathy, direct confrontation was participants’ preferred approach to addressing doping. *Conclusion:* Student-athletes are reluctant to blow the whistle on doping so the currently promoted method for reporting wrongdoing may be met with resistance. Instead, student-athletes indicate a willingness to personally confront PED users, which has the potential to protect both the doping athlete and whistleblower, while simultaneously reducing the presence of PEDs in sport. Thus, these findings serve to stimulate debate and discussion within anti-doping efforts regarding the possibility of confrontation being encouraged as an effective deterrent to sport doping.

**Key Words:** whistleblowing, true moral dilemma, doping, student-athletes, performance enhancing drugs, track and field

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“I don’t know if I would report them”: Student-athletes’ thoughts, feelings and anticipated behaviours on blowing the whistle on doping in sport.

Despite millions of dollars being invested in detection-deterrence methods, doping control procedures, policy advancements and scientific research, performance enhancing drug (PED) use is omnipresent in sport. Consequently, there is a growing need for evidence-based interventions designed to prevent their use. That said, in the wake of numerous high profile cases of whistleblowing in sport (e.g., Yuliya Stepanova and Vitaly Stepanov regarding Russian Athletics), the concept of blowing the whistle on doping has garnered increasing interest from researchers (e.g., Whitaker, Long, & Backhouse, 2014), the media, and anti-doping organisations worldwide. To encourage whistleblowing, significant resources are directed towards ‘Report Doping’ hotlines; including a recently launched independent whistleblowing platform – SportsLeaks – that is maintained by a group of international investigative journalists (“Sports Doping Leaks,” 2016).

As the introduction of these hotlines exemplifies, an emphasis on intelligence-driven approaches to anti-doping has emerged over the past five years and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) are compelling individuals with information on doping to come forward. The revised Code (Article 10.6.1; WADA, 2015) reinforces this shift in focus by including the possibility for athletes to have the length of their sanctions reduced (and/or removed completely) for providing substantial assistance leading to an anti-doping rule violation (ADRV). However, limited attention has been afforded to the social psychology of whistleblowing and, in particular, deepening our understanding of the antecedents (individual, situational, cultural) of the behaviour. In turn, the development and implementation of appropriate measures for encouraging and facilitating whistleblowing within sport doping is hindered.

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The term ‘whistleblowing’ signifies, “...the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to affect action” (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). Thus, it is considered an effective form of self-regulation (Rennie & Crosby, 2002) and is generally viewed as a dichotomous act whereby one can either ‘blow the whistle’ or remain silent (Teo & Casperz, 2011). However, it is not a straightforward issue. When deciding what to do in a possible whistleblowing situation, individuals are regularly confronted with a serious dilemma; ‘the morality of loyalty’ and ‘the morality of principle’ (Uys & Senekal, 2008). ‘Morality of loyalty’ represents an obligation to people, organisations or groups within a particular context. Within this, ‘organisational loyalty’ suggests an individual should act in good faith for the best interests of all involved in an organisation, constantly seeking to protect its reputation. Meanwhile, the ‘morality of principle’ suggests that individuals should adhere to certain abstract principles irrespective of those involved in the situation. Principally, the relationship one has with individuals (e.g., fellow athletes) should be considered more important than any organisational (e.g., WADA) obligations or expectations.

While whistleblowing generally involves a moral dilemma (Uys & Senekal, 2008), blowing the whistle on doping is particularly challenging in that it presents a ‘true moral dilemma’; two equally valid and demanding moral options (Bredemeier & Stephenson, 1967; Uys & Senekal, 2008). Therefore, an individual has two choices: (1) conform to the morality of principle and negate the morality of loyalty (i.e., adhere to a code of silence), or (2) conform to the morality of loyalty and negate the morality of principle (i.e., blow the whistle). Put simply, do you report the doping athlete to protect the rights of athletes at large to compete in ‘clean sport’ (doping-free) or do you stay quiet to protect the doping athlete’s athletic career, reputation and wellbeing given the social consequences associated with being

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labelled a ‘doper’ (Georgiadis & Papazoglou, 2014)? Importantly, both options result in someone being harmed.

Within whistleblowing literature, *individual* factors believed to increase the occurrence of whistleblowing include: considering whistleblowing to be integral to one’s role responsibility (Miceli & Near, 2002); good job performance, highly educated, in supervisory positions (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Dungan, Waytz, & Young, 2015); endorsing fairness over loyalty (Dungan et al., 2015), and being an extrovert (Bjorkelo, Einarsen, & Matthiesen, 2010). Additionally, *situational* factors that enhance whistleblowing behaviours include perceived support (for whistleblowing) from management (Keenan, 2000) and functioning in an organisational climate/culture that supports whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 1985, 1988; Rennie & Crosby, 2002). Conversely, fear of retribution (e.g., job loss, negative labels) represents the dominant deterrent to whistleblowing (Teo & Casperz, 2011).

Considering fear of retribution is a significant concern for (potential) whistleblowers, critical conversations regarding whistleblowing must acknowledge possible consequences associated with it. Historically, whistleblowing incidents have not been well received. The act has become synonymous with terms such as “snitching” and “ratting” (Natapoff, 2004, p. 651), and regularly places the whistleblower and their reputation, job, and livelihood in serious jeopardy (Baron, 2013). Regardless of the specific context in which whistleblowing occurs, consequences including being bullied, shunned, and dis-credited by others are commonplace (Dasgupta & Kesharwani, 2010). Reinforcing this, whistleblowers have been victimised by employers (Uys & Senekal, 2008) with lawsuits, job loss, defamation, and disgrace (Rennie & Crosby, 2002). Critically, retribution for whistleblowing is evident within the context of sport as well.

Making headlines worldwide, Russian husband and wife couple, Yuliya Stepanova and Vitaly Stepanov, initially blew the whistle on systematic doping in Russia in 2014. In

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anticipation of the negative backlash they expected to receive for coming forward, the couple took their newborn son and left Russia; knowing it was unlikely that they would ever be able to return (James, 2014). Now over two years later, Yuliya's Anti-Doping Administration and Management System (ADAMS) was recently hacked (WADA, 2016), sparking concern that someone tried to pinpoint their location. The trio were therefore forced to relocate yet again and it is understood that they are currently living at a new undisclosed location in America. Speaking to the incident, Stepanova warned, "...if something happens to us, all of you should know it is not an accident" (Axon, 2016). By 'something' she was referring to the possibility of being murdered (NBC, 2016). Clearly this is an extreme example of retribution for whistleblowing, but it raises concern over the likelihood of whistleblowers coming forward in the future. Substantiating these concerns, sport culture has been associated with an unwritten 'code of silence' that protects athletes from having their drug use exposed and punished (Shipley, 2013). This culture can simultaneously deter individuals from blowing the whistle on doping (Whitaker et al., 2014) since speaking up or acting in a way that contradicts the norm is considered risky behaviour (Baron, 2013). Moreover, jeopardising the trust of a teammate or fellow athlete may be considered significantly more damaging than an anti-doping sanction (Taunton, 2011). Taken together, there are clear obstacles to promoting whistleblowing within the context of sport doping and they must be acknowledged.

That said, anti-doping rules, like competition rules, are sport rules governing the conditions under which sport is played (WADA, 2015). Accordingly, student-athletes participating in organised sport are generally bound by these rules; thus, they are compelled to report doping behaviour. At the same time, student-athletes have been highlighted for their susceptibility to doping (Erickson, McKenna, & Backhouse, 2015) and are considered at elevated risk for PED use (Buckman, Farris, & Yusko, 2013). Although publicised incidents of blowing the whistle on doping have been limited to elite level sport to date, student-

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athletes generally represent the next generation of elite athletes. Corroborating this assertion, Rio 2016 Games participants included 1,018 incoming, current, or former National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) student-athletes representing 107 different countries (Martinez, 2016). Thus, student-athletes are well-positioned to influence the conversation and culture around whistleblowing in sport both currently and in their future athletic endeavours. Meanwhile, as of May 31, 2016, track and field athletes had received more doping sanctions worldwide than any other sport for the year 2016, with a total of 39 ADRVs recorded (MPCC, 2016). Given the current situation facing track and field athletics, personally choosing not to use PEDs is insufficient for ensuring clean sport. That is, since doping athletes are unlikely to turn themselves in without first being caught, the successful pursuit of doping-free sport is largely contingent upon athletes and athlete support personnel (ASP) coming forward with doping information. In choosing not to come forward, the current intelligence-led approach to clean sport is jeopardised. Thus, track and field student-athletes provide an ideal population for anti-doping researchers to interact with and to shape our understanding of the matters at hand.

Given the culture of silence that permeates sport and the examples of whistleblowing retribution already evident within the context of sport doping, calls for whistleblowers to come forward must be underpinned by a robust evidence-base. Despite over three decades of whistleblowing research being conducted within public sectors (Near & Miceli, 1985), comparable research within the context of sport is sparse. In response, this research was conceived to inform current anti-doping efforts by: (1) capturing student-athletes' anticipated behaviours relative to blowing the whistle on PED use in sport, and (2) exploring the attitudes and beliefs that underpin their anticipated whistleblowing behaviours.

## Methodology and Method



### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Working within the interpretive paradigm, this research adopted relativist ontology (reality is socially and experientially influenced and shaped) and transactional/subjectivist epistemology (the investigator and investigated are linked through their interactions and findings form as the investigation unfolds). Accordingly, knowledge is created through the interaction that takes place between the investigator and their participant(s), with constructions subject to continuous revisions. Knowledge consists of the constructs that have the most consensus, implying that multiple “knowledges” can coexist. Finally, methodology is hermeneutical and dialectical (constructions can only be elicited and refined through interactions between and among the investigator and the investigated).

Within this paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand and reconstruct the constructions that people hold (both those of the investigated and those of the investigator), aiming towards consensus but remaining open to the evolution of interpretations over time. Accordingly, the researcher’s personal experience and positioning is acknowledged as influencing most (if not all) of the various stages within the research process (Douglas & Carless, 2015).

### **Participants and Procedures**

In light of our philosophical underpinnings, a combination of convenience and snowball sampling approaches were employed to identify suitable individuals who: (1) competed in the sport of track and field, (2) were in minimum second year of university (and/or graduated within the past year), and (3) attended NCAA Division I or II or British University and College Sports (BUCS) universities. Participants in both countries were targeted given the lead researcher had previous experience as a student-athlete in both countries (i.e., was an ‘insider’); thus, had personal connections with key gatekeepers in each

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context. Meanwhile, the particular divisions were included because they enforce anti-doping policies. In total, 28 student-athletes agreed to participate in the study; 14 from UK universities (57.1% male) and 14 from US NCAA Division I (64.3%; 11.1% male) and II (35.7%; 80% male) universities. Participants ranged in age from 19-26 years old ( $M$  age = 21 years) and represented various track and field disciplines (See Table 1).

Insert Table 1

Table 1

### *Participant Demographics*

In order to understand the meanings that people construct, researchers need to consider the particular contexts in which they act, and the influence that this context has on thoughts, beliefs, and actions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Qualitative research allows for this by focussing on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world. Within this, the aim is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups, and cultures, and to explore the behaviours, perspectives, and experiences of people in their daily lives. Responding to calls (e.g., Hoff, 2012) for a more dynamic methodological approach within doping literature, our research adopted a narrative approach. Narrative research assumes that individuals' lives are storied and that the self is narratively constructed. Individuals organise their experiences through and into narratives, and assign meaning to them through storytelling (Phoenix, Smith, & Sparkes, 2010). Therefore, narrative research focusses on the stories that people tell about their experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), taking into consideration how these stories unfold over time (Smith, 2010). Of particular significance to us, stories are considered one of the most effective ways to gain insights into individuals'

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lives (Douglas & Carless, 2015). In this case, insights into an aspect of student-athletes' lives (i.e., attitudes and experiences towards addressing doping) that are currently undocumented.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face by the lead author at various locations throughout the UK and US (as chosen by participants) and ranged in length from 50 minutes to nearly three hours ( $M = 1$  hour 45 minutes). In line with a narrative approach, data was collected using semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility according to what the participants shared. Specifically, participants' life stories were sought; that is, details regarding biographical, historical, and cultural contexts associated with participants' current situations and experiences (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Stories are both personal and social (Sparkes, 1999), providing the potential for revealing an intimate picture of what contributes to shaping athletes' opinions and behaviours regarding PED use. Moreover, stories told by a particular group of tellers opens a window on their culture (Sparkes & Partington, 2003); in this instance, a culture that little is known about.

Consistent with the life story approach, participants were encouraged to provide an account of their athletic career, with childhood and early experiences serving as the catalyst for key stages and experiences in their adult sporting career (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). This technique allowed participants to answer on their own terms and shape the discussion to reflect their unique experiences (Pappa & Kennedy, 2012). In light of the taboo and stigmatised nature of doping, and in an attempt to gain participants' confidence and establish rapport, interviews commenced with a focus on individuals' athletic careers rather than directly addressing doping. To illustrate, the first question asked was: *can you describe how you first became involved in sport?* Questions then progressed to where they are now (e.g., *describe for me the progression of your athletic career?*), and culminated with a discussion of their views towards doping in sport. During this portion of the interview, four key questions were asked and constitute the focus of this analysis: (1) *How do you feel about*

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*PEDs?*, (2) *How does it make you feel knowing a competitor could be using PEDs?*, (3) *If a teammate offered you PEDs would you be tempted?*, (4) *If you knew a teammate/competitor was using PEDs would you report? If 'yes', who would you report to?* While the first three questions provided an overview of participants' general attitudes towards PEDs, the final question pertained specifically to the concept of whistleblowing. Importantly, throughout the interviews, the term 'report' was intentionally used instead of 'blow the whistle' due to the negative connotation associated with 'whistleblowing'. The overall structure of the interview guide was considered significant in light of researchers' (Douglas & Carless, 2015) warning that a rich understanding of emotions, responses and meanings is not possible without an appreciation for what has gone before and what is expected to come after. Accordingly, once the interview guide was developed it was reviewed by researchers experienced in qualitative research.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

Narrative analysis takes the story itself as the object of enquiry (Phoenix et al., 2010) and seeks to interpret the ways individuals perceive reality and make sense of their worlds. Within narrative analysis, researchers can choose to focus on *what* participants say or analyse *how* stories are told by participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In turn, being classed as a *story analyst* or *storyteller* respectively. For the purposes of this research, we have adopted the role of a story analyst. Accordingly, the stories collected were considered fundamental data for systematic, rigorous narrative analysis and we have attempted to explain and think about certain features within them.

To facilitate our analysis of the stories, an inductive (i.e., data-driven) thematic analysis approach based on Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted. Importantly, despite having a cross-national sample, considering that only one study has explored the issue of

whistleblowing within the context of doping in sport to date (Whitaker et al., 2014), we decided to treat the transcripts as one dataset rather than two separate datasets. Once an initial evidence-base regarding whistleblowing attitudes in sport is established, our vision is that the next step will be to explore potential cultural differences. Accordingly, for the analysis of this research, all interviews were transcribed verbatim by the lead author, providing the first opportunity to become familiar with the data (Reissman, 1993) and informing the early stages of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were managed using Olympus Sonority software and analysed by the lead author. Second, initial codes for the data were created by the lead author and then discussed amongst the research team, with amendments made accordingly<sup>1</sup>. Third, codes were manually sorted into potential themes by the lead author and then discussed at length amongst the research team. Fourth, a detailed analysis for each unique theme was conducted to ensure that there was adequate narrative support for each, and a thematic map was created using Mindview 5.0. Fifth, the thematic map was collectively reviewed and then refined accordingly. Finally, the results section was produced based on the combination of all 28 interviews. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect anonymity.

### **Markers of Quality**

Judging the quality of quantitative research is generally straightforward, revolving around issues of objectivity, reliability, generalisability, and validity. Conversely, qualitative researchers are left to make informed choices about key issues related to trustworthiness (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Given our philosophical underpinnings, we were mindful that the findings, discussion, and conclusions offered in this research were co-constructed; they stem

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<sup>1</sup> Deliberating with the wider research team was paramount given the lead researcher's 'insider' status. Team reflection/discussion helped illuminate (and minimise) potential personal biases in the data analysis process by adding a critical 'outsider' perspective.

from the relationship formed between the lead author and the participants. To this end, the lead author's status as an 'insider' seemed to help establish rapport with participants, demonstrated by the taboo and candid stories that were often shared by participants (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Nevertheless, to further establish quality we have adopted and addressed Tracy's (2010) criteria for judging excellence in qualitative research, which are: (1) worthy topic, (2) rich rigour, (3) sincerity, (4) credibility, (5) resonance, (6) significant contribution, (7) ethical, and (8) meaningful coherence. Notably, colleagues (Chan et al., 2014) in the field have recently employed the same criteria.

We have satisfied the *worthy topic* criteria by selecting a topic that is relevant, timely, and significant. *Rich rigour* has been addressed by using complex theoretical constructs. *Sincerity* has been accounted for by being transparent about our methods. We have sought to establish *credibility* by providing thick description, concrete detail, and showing rather than telling. Meanwhile, we have addressed *resonance* by offering aesthetic and evocative representations. Our research has sought to make a *significant contribution* conceptually, theoretically, practically, morally, and methodologically. We have been *ethical* through considering procedural ethics (such as human subjects), and have paid particular attention to relational ethics. Finally, *meaningful coherence* has been attended to by interconnecting literature, research questions, findings and interpretations with one another. Critically, while Tracy (2010) suggests that this list represents a universal measure for qualitative research, we maintain a non-foundationalist position in this regard. That is, we feel this list provides appropriate criteria for judging this research but other qualitative research may warrant differing criteria. That said, in line with our philosophical underpinnings, we would ask that our research be viewed in light of these criteria.

## Findings and Discussion

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This section is shaped in line with the study's primary research aims. First, the stance that "It's breaking the rules and I think it's wrong" is presented, offering insights into participants' attitudes towards PED use in sport. Next, the concept of "It depends who it is" is explored, detailing participants' anticipated behaviours in relation to blowing the whistle on PED use in sport. Specifically, four avenues for addressing PED use were identified and labelled: (1) confront the PED user directly, (2) report the PED use to 'someone' who was not officially linked to anti-doping efforts (e.g., coach), (3) report directly to anti-doping 'authorities' (i.e., Report Doping hotline), or (4) ignore the behaviour. It is important to note that the findings present what participants intend to do in each situation and are not necessarily representative of their actual behaviours and/or experiences.

### **"It's breaking the rules and I think it's wrong"**

All participants were conscious of the fact that PED use is against the rules of sport and suggested that they do not belong in sport at any level. Moreover, the majority appeared confident that given the opportunity to use PEDs right now, their answer would be a defiant 'no'. Substantiating previous research (Collins, MacNamara, Collins, & Bailey, 2012), when asked why they would say 'no' to doping, the unanimous conclusion was that using PEDs would be 'wrong'. Illustrating this, Brad said:

Absolutely not...because it's breaking the rules and I think it's wrong. Even if...every other athlete in the competition is using and I wasn't, if they were banned and they were not allowed, then they'd be wrong. And ultimately if they got found out I'd be the only clean athlete in that competition and would technically still win. Whereas if I take them and still don't win, I'm banned as well. So...absolutely no circumstances would I take them.

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Steve echoed this sentiment, stating, “I wouldn’t do it because I know it’s wrong”, and Pat added, “I see how wrong it is”. Meanwhile, Luke offered an analogy:

I’ve just always been like ‘they’re wrong’ and...I don’t know...I just think it’s really unfair...it’s like a cheap way to win...it’s like if you’re playing chess and you get up and walk away and the guy you’re playing moves the pieces around a little bit and then you get back and then like they do one move and you lost; I just feel like it’s kind of that same concept...it’s just wrong on all accounts and it’s just not right...

In addition to declaring the use of PEDs as fundamentally ‘wrong’, participants also conveyed the dominant cultural narrative that using PEDs is cheating (Tamburrini, 2000). Exemplifying this, Sally would not use PEDs, “because it’s cheating...it’s just not what sport is about”. Richard reiterated this point:

It’s just not in the rules of sport. So I think just by that definition it’s cheating...it’s like going into a test with an answer sheet...you’ve prepared even more than you’re allowed to... ...it would be like putting a cheat code in a game almost where you get...the reward that you want but you haven’t had to work for them as well so it’s...no longer the same like you’ve...just defeated the whole point of playing the game which is to sort of progress and get rewards and just to sort of get to the end of – I think it would just be like reading the last page in a book like you just sort of ruined everything.

Given the aims of this research, if PED use in sport is considered ‘wrong’ and ‘cheating’ by these participants, it would correspond that blowing the whistle on PED use



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would be an appropriate – even warranted – approach to promoting doping-free sport.

However, our findings point to a more complex and nuanced view of whistleblowing.

### **“It depends who it is”**

Despite most participants adamantly refuting the possibility of personally using PEDs, less than half of them affirmed with conviction (said ‘yes’) that they would report someone else’s PED use. Of these, even fewer suggested blowing the whistle through official channels, more often indicating that they would inform a coach or someone of that nature. Despite fostering visibly negative attitudes towards PEDs, rather than automatically blow the whistle on doping, most participants would first explore alternative options. Exemplifying this, Paul showed no restraint in detailing his feelings towards a doping athlete:

The way I feel is I hate anybody...I have no respect for anybody – and I will use the word ‘hate’ easily – anyone who does that [uses PEDs] because you’re...taking the piss out of your friends. You’re taking the piss out of the coaches and everybody else and you’ve got no respect for anybody by doing it. No matter what your sob story...I take no...prisoners sort of thing...I don’t care for that person.

Notwithstanding his intense emotional reaction to PED users, with regards to reporting, Paul said, “if I can see my friend...getting off it, stopping it, by that threat of me reporting them...they’re off it so quickly, and they can prove that to me then I probably wouldn’t report it”. On the other hand, “if it was a random person...and it came up...almost like ‘oh yeah I’m just going to quickly inject myself with this’...no doubt I’d be like ‘you’re a fool’” and consequently, Paul would blow the whistle. Intriguingly, he subsequently explained, “I would still report someone I know personally if they’ve got no decision. If they think they’ve

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got no choice...but continue to do it". However, he then revisits his initial reaction, "if someone said to me 'look. Actually I tried this once' or 'I was really tempted and got in contact with this person' I wouldn't report them. I would just be like; I would really...try and help". Paul's excerpt illustrates the complexity of the true moral dilemma (Uys & Senekal, 2008); should he protect the organisation (i.e., clean sport/team/university) or the individual (i.e., PED user)? Further evidencing this dilemma, Paula explained:

I think it really depends on the situation...I don't know if I would because I think I would feel so sorry for them if they were in a situation where they were taking drugs...it just depends on how loyal I feel to that person. I just would never want to be the person to kind of crush someone's world and report them but then at the same time they would already be crushing my world by using this unfair advantage. So...I really don't know. Um...I would hope that...someone would I guess it would just be that I wouldn't necessarily want to be the person to do it...I wouldn't want to...tear apart their life.

Paula highlights an interesting predicament – not wanting to 'crush' the individual's world, meanwhile, their behaviour could well impinge on Paula's world. As a result, which action can be most comfortably justified? Given her uncertainty, Paula hopes 'someone' would report. Extending the uncertainty exhibited by participants thus far, Brad equated the possibility of reporting a PED user to, "it's like 'would you report a member of your own family for breaking the law?' [laughs] it's difficult but...probably would yeah". When asked to expand, he shared that his main concern about reporting PED use would be:

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If they got caught and were subsequently banned...then it's not ultimately you who stopped them doing it, it's them by taking it in the first place, but...your relationship would certainly change at that point...and they'd maybe look at you differently for telling the authorities that they'd been taking something. So that would make it difficult. Certainly the relationship would change between you and the person.

Notably, Richard expressed similar concerns regarding potential whistleblowing consequences:

There would be an emotional tie between my teammate and myself I assume and...I wouldn't want to sort of break it so by me reporting it I imagine that would sort of break it pretty strong, pretty quickly...so...that's probably the main reason why I wouldn't want to [report].

Insightfully, participants' reluctance to be the person to actually whistleblow was predominantly underpinned by relational concerns. Exemplifying this, participants were intentionally posed with the option of reporting "a teammate/competitor" so that they would have to deliberately separate the two if they felt it was important. Compellingly, more than half of them did. Moreover, littered throughout the transcripts were examples of these categories being further divided, suggesting that the terms were not specific enough given the significance of the situation. The word 'teammate' was replaced with: 'close to me', 'someone I got along with and liked', 'really close friend', 'friendly teammate', 'anyone I'm more than sort of like neutral about', and 'close within this group'. Meanwhile, the word 'competitor' was substituted with: 'they weren't that close', 'someone I didn't know personally', 'teammate who didn't care about me', 'I didn't like very much', and 'a

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randomer'. The distinctions indicate that just because someone is labelled a 'teammate' does not necessarily mean a personal relationship exists. Equally, being a 'competitor' does not automatically eliminate the possibility of a relationship existing. Therefore, it seems choices regarding blowing the whistle on doping are not dependent on titles but, rather, relational factors. While relationships have previously been identified as influential in determining whether or not an athlete will personally use PEDs (Erickson et al., 2015), their potential influence within the context of addressing PEDs has not previously been explored. Our research provides initial evidence to this regard.

Stemming largely from relational concerns attached to whistleblowing, participants refute the dichotomous process whereby you either blow the whistle or stay silent within the context of addressing PED use in sport. Instead, they reinforce the idea that whistleblowing is just one of many pro-social behaviours that can rectify wrongdoing (Miceli, Near, & Schwenk, 1991). Therefore, it is important to explore the four specific avenues for addressing PED use that they proposed.

**Confront the PED user directly.** The majority of participants anticipated that their first step in addressing PED use would be to confront the PED user directly. Consistent with relational concerns, this option was generally attributed to PED users whom participants had (hypothetical) relationships with. Illustrating this, Susan suggested her approach, "depends how close I was with these people...if they were quite close I would confront them about it...if it was someone close I would talk to them about it...I don't think I would tell on them..." Similarly, Rod said:

I would maybe even try to approach the person first yeah like 'you need to knock this off or if you don't I'm going to report you'...I would probably do that scenario first um well...it probably depends on the relationship too of the person. The person I

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have...a better relationship with I would definitely be like ‘hey you know knock this off’ where with a competitor might not give them so much of a chance.

Rod noticeably differentiates between the way he would address a teammate versus a competitor. Mirroring this attitude, Richard said:

Teammate, probably not initially. I think it would be one of those things where I’d want to talk to them first...that would be a really difficult one to report...a teammate. Uh...probably...I’d almost probably [groans - pause] probably not...I probably wouldn’t want to.

Insightfully, Richard followed this statement by stating, “I know that sounds bad seeing as you’re supposed to report everyone, but...” It seems Richard is conscious of the fact that whistleblowing is expected of individuals. Meanwhile, the pauses and hesitations within his response demonstrate his reservations towards whistleblowing.

Importantly, while participants generally suggested that they would confront PED users (whom they had a personal relationship with) rather than report them, for the majority, confrontation was a first step. That is, if the PED user did not respond to their confrontation by ceasing their PED use, then participants anticipated taking further action. Essentially, the confrontation would serve as a threat and a chance for the PED user to change their behaviour without having to be reported. Illustrating this mentality, Ralph said that if the PED user was, “somebody close within this group”, then, “I think I would personally speak to them first...I would go to some effort, depending on who it was, and I’d be like ‘what are you doing?’ kind of thing. Just ‘you’re just ruining your career’”. He then suggested, “I think if it got to a stage

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where they were abusing it quite bad then I would...consider reporting them". Thus, while Ralph's initial step would be confrontation, if that proved unsuccessful, he would consider taking the next step and reporting. Notably, Ralph's proposed approach appears to be underpinned by his belief that, "at heart you do try and protect their [teammate] best interest...you'll try and advise them to stop it, get out kind of thing". Exhibiting a similar mind-set, Jane explained that with regards to reporting PED use, "I think if it was a competitor; yes". Conversely, she explained:

If...my housemate [i.e., teammate] was like 'I'm taking drugs' I'd be like 'for fucks sake' and then I'd be like 'right you have to stop doing this'. I think I would tell her to stop doing it and then...if she didn't...I wouldn't know what to do. I'd just be like 'okay I'm probably going to have to tell somebody about this' like 'you probably shouldn't be doing that' [laughing]...at first I'd be like 'ok you should stop that' I would just say it to her and see what she said before I was like uh to the head of athletics or something like 'my mate's taking drugs' like 'you need to stop her doing it'.

The idea of confronting PED users as a form of threat, and in an attempt to protect them/offer them a way out, was reiterated throughout the narratives. Pete said, "I just always feel like if you can talk to them first that's the best thing to do like figure out the reason why they're doing it and just try...to help them see why it's wrong". Notably, he specified, "that would be my first option and then if they didn't listen and they didn't want help then...I feel like I would have to report them". Extending this, Sam noted that confrontation would serve as a 'chance' for the PED user to choose to change:

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If it was like a teammate and someone that I really like am close with, I'd talk to them first and be like 'you need to stop' and then if they didn't and it was becoming a problem to them and like affecting them in a negative way then...I'd tell them 'I'm going to report you if you don't do this' and give them the chance to like fess up or stop and then I'd do it [report] if they didn't.

Intriguingly, Pam suggested that she would not only prefer to confront a PED user but that she would offer them specific advice:

I think I'd talk to the person first, depending on how much I felt I could say, and just say 'you realise the risk you're taking? Like you're going to get caught. Stop.' You know, 'go on a long holiday or something and wait until it's out of your system' because the risk is just not worth it.

Taken together, these accounts exhibit a level of empathy being exercised by participants when determining the appropriateness of blowing the whistle on PED use. Empathy is a potential psychological motivator for helping others in distress and can be defined as the ability to feel or imagine another person's emotional experiences. Moreover, empathy is involved in the internalisation of rules which, in turn, play a role in protecting others (McDonald & Messinger, 2011). Based on the narratives presented here, empathy appears to be an important factor in determining how to address doping. Specifically, it causes participants to hesitate at the thought of whistleblowing. Accordingly, anti-doping efforts would be wise to incorporate the concept of empathy within education and interventions moving forward.

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Overall, confronting the PED user was the most commonly referenced approach provided by participants. Meanwhile, it was predominantly suggested within the context of addressing a PED user whom they had a relationship with.

**Report to ‘someone’.** Commonly suggested as the sequel to an unsuccessful (i.e., PED use continued) confrontation episode, at times, participants suggested they would report PED use to ‘someone’. Most commonly, ‘someone’ took the form of a coach. Illustrating this, Sam said that if confronting a teammate did not work then:

I would go to the coach...because I feel like my coach would also give them another chance...instead of going straight to like the higher up like NCAA and getting them in trouble to where they can’t compete at all because I like to give people chances...I don’t feel like it should be all or none or you just get one chance.

Sam is noticeably comforted by believing her coach would seek to protect the PED user from more stringent punishment. Exhibiting similar desires, Maggie said she would report a PED user to her coach because:

It’s about finding them the resources to deal with this more than just getting them in trouble or banning them. It’s about them...having a reality check and nipping something in the butt before it becomes something that’s detrimental to their life.

Similarly, Luke stressed the necessity of reporting ongoing PED use to his coach:

If they didn’t listen and they didn’t want help then I would just...feel like I would have to report them...I think I would talk to my coach about it like I don’t think I



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would try to do things on my own strength like I wouldn't know what to do I would just talk to my coach and just be like 'hey coach...I tried to help them, I tried to talk to them, they aren't listening. Maybe you could help them or talk to them'.

For Luke, turning to the coach appears to be a response to the fact that he 'wouldn't know what to do' should an athlete continue to use PEDs. Notably, Paula provided a similar response, "I think if I did ever report all I would know is to go to the coaches just to tell them my suspicions and then hope that from there they would say where to go". In this context, it seems coaches would be approached given their availability and presumed knowledge. At the same time, it could be due to Luke and Paula's *lack* of knowledge. Not being aware of resources for reporting doping use is worrying. Substantiating this concern, Richard mentioned that he would, "try and anonymously report it if I could", suggesting he is not aware of the numerous 24-7 Report Doping hotlines dedicated specifically to anonymous reporting. Meanwhile, when asked how he would report, Pat said, "I don't know. I'd have to find out [laughs] now I wouldn't know but I know I could find that out...I'm sure I could ask someone and they'd know". Not being aware of existing Report Doping mechanisms could be preventing reporting from happening, a possibility that has only recently been acknowledged (Whitaker et al., 2014). Given the emergence of this issue within our participants, information on available Report Doping mechanisms should be incorporated into anti-doping education moving forward.

Importantly, alongside this approach being suggested as a sequential step following an unsuccessful confrontation, multiple participants also proposed adopting it if/when they did not have a relationship with the (hypothetical) PED user. Practically, Gina said, "it's not like you can go up to a competitor and reason it out with them so...I think in that sense I probably would just talk to my coach about it or something". Meanwhile, if the PED user was not

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“someone close” then Susan suggested, “I would mention it to my coach. See what he says...obviously then it’s...in the open then we can discuss it between us...and then you’ve got someone else’s point of view”. Similarly, Rod explained that, “if I had figured out that a competitor was [using PEDs]...I’d probably mention something... ..go to coach, be like ‘hey I think this person should probably be tested’ and just leave it at that...I probably wouldn’t go into detail”. As seen, reporting to ‘someone’ commonly constituted reporting to a coach. Meanwhile, it was generally proposed as a response to PED users continuing to use PEDs despite being confronted or in the instance of the PED user being someone the participant did not have a relationship with.

**Report to anti-doping ‘authorities’.** A small number of participants indicated that they would go to ‘authorities’ with doping information. For instance, when asked whether he would report doping, without hesitating, Steve replied, “we have an anonymous hotline that we can report to so I would use that”. Meanwhile, Lucy shared that while she would first confront a PED user, she would ultimately report them:

Because while I understand why they would be doing it...I would also be worried about them that they were harming themselves. I mean I’d certainly talk to them personally before I reported them. I wouldn’t jump straight on the phone and call the anti-doping agency, but I just think...if you had gotten to that point, there would be very few things that would bring you back from taking them than someone reporting you...it certainly wouldn’t be an easy decision if they were your friend or your teammate but...yeah I would see it as a personal failing if I didn’t report them because it would be almost condoning what they were doing.

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While Lucy demonstrated a level of concern for the PED user despite her intentions to report via official channels, Val spoke strictly of reporting. In response to (hypothetically) identifying a PED user, she immediately said, “I will report you”. Tellingly, she then specified, “you can report someone but...they might not get caught because...it’s a warn-off or they pass time”. Accordingly, she asserted that, “you will get caught. I will make sure you get caught”. For Val, simply reporting is insufficient – she expects follow through and appropriate punishment to be delivered. While only three participants specified that they would report through official channels, it is important to note that Pete, Stan, Bre and Patti also indicated that they would report PED use. However, they did not specify how (or to whom) they would do this.

**Ignore.** Despite ‘staying silent’ constituting one of the two dichotomous processes generally associated with whistleblowing, this option was rarely referenced. Moreover, with the exception of Mark, it was never offered as a generic approach. Illustrating this, Nat said she would “probably not” report doping because:

They’re my teammate and even though I don’t agree with it, they’re going to make that choice...I’ll let them make that decision and if it comes back to bite them then that’s on them but I’m not going to necessarily go tell anyone because I don’t want to be that person to like end their career or get them kicked off the team.

However, she admitted she might be, “a little more inclined [to report] if it was someone from a different team and I saw them using PEDs”. Thus, Nat does not anticipate ignoring PED behaviours on all occasions. Conversely, Mark argued that doping is, “just an athlete’s way of thinking...you’re willing to do anything to beat the other guy and who can

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blame them?” Given his attitude, Mark was not inclined to address PED use regardless of the particular situation. Critically, Mark was the only participant who exhibited this attitude.

### Implications

As demonstrated, participants predominantly consider PED use to be ‘wrong’ and ‘cheating’ and the vast majority exhibited a desire for PED use to be addressed. However, when anticipating how they would personally address PED use, this desire was generally accompanied by a reluctance to actually whistleblow through official channels. Refuting the traditional dichotomous approach to whistleblowing, participants here suggest that there are four feasible avenues for addressing doping (See Figure 1). Of these, the (projected) preferred option is pro-actively confronting the behaviour, while the least favoured is the possibility of overlooking it. Confrontation presents a novel approach to deterring doping that warrants consideration among anti-doping efforts.

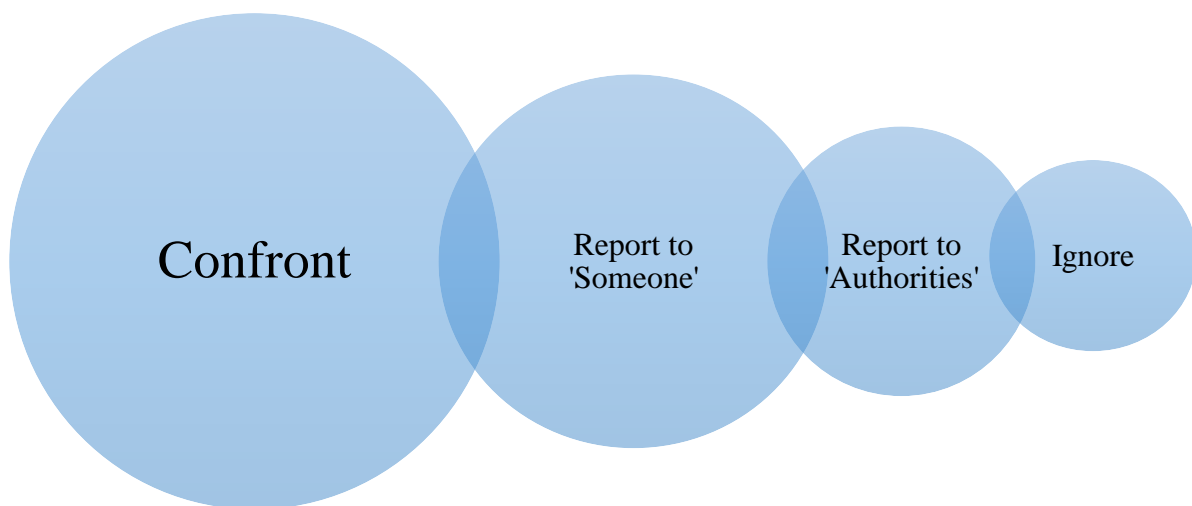


Figure 1

*Student-athletes' anticipated approaches towards blowing the whistle on PED use (in order of reference).*

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Confrontation – a form of self-regulation – represents an everyday behaviour for many of these participants. Meanwhile, research in the financial sector (Teo & Casperz, 2011) suggests that utilising everyday forms of regulation within particular groups may assist in dissolving acts of wrongdoing (e.g., doping) before they escalate into larger scale problems (e.g., team-wide issue); however, it is acknowledged that this approach deviates from the traditional understanding of ‘blowing the whistle’. With that in mind, confrontation is considered an ‘informal sanction’ in the form of negative feedback received from significant others (Bowers, 2014). While formal sanctions (i.e., bans) are considered strong deterrents to PED use and underpin the current anti-doping detection-deterrence approach, increasing evidence suggests athletes also perceive informal sanctions to be costly (Overbye, Knudsen, & Pfister, 2013; Bowers, 2014).

Cumulatively, this evidence suggests that encouraging and empowering athletes and ASP to confront PED users could feasibly reduce the prevalence of doping in sport. Given the true moral dilemma associated with reporting doping in sport, we must acknowledge that not everyone is going to be able and/or willing to blow the whistle on doping. However, that does not mean they cannot play a role in the pursuit of clean sport. Based on our findings, confrontation presents an additional means for individuals to actively protect the right of athletes at large to compete in doping-free sport. Specifically, confrontation offers a community-based approach that capitalises on everyday behaviours as a deterrent. Thus, anti-doping practitioners, policy makers and researchers should explore the feasibility of designing and implementing education interventions that equip and empower athletes and ASP to effectively and safely confront doping behaviours.

### **Limitations**

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Although this research offers critical insights concerning track and field student-athletes' attitudes and intentions towards addressing PED use, it is not without limitations. First, the use of interviews presents the possibility of participants not being transparent in their contributions. To minimise this possibility, participants were informed that their anonymity would be protected, and discussions initially revolved around performance enhancing strategies in general rather than directly addressing banned PEDs. Second, our findings are context-bound and are not intended to be representative of all non-user athletes, all sports (e.g., team), nor generalisable to all of the UK or US as few contexts can be closely replicated. Third, research (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005) indicates that predictors of intention to whistleblow are not the same as those of actual whistleblowing; thus, it is important to bear in mind that our findings depict participants' anticipated whistleblowing behaviour rather than their actual behaviours. Finally, we have made no distinctions between the expressed attitudes of males versus females. This is a common limitation in the literature, but we have conducted context-specific research focussing on one sport to address the limitation of aggregate reporting across sports, which previous research has generally failed to do.

### **Conclusion**

In the midst of mounting calls for individuals to whistleblow on doping behaviour, student-athletes demonstrate (anticipated) reluctance towards playing the role of the whistleblower, suggesting that the current emphasis on this approach to deterring doping may be met with resistance. Instead, student-athletes indicate a willingness to personally confront PED users. This approach has the potential to protect both the doping athlete and the whistleblower, while simultaneously reducing the presence of PEDs in sport. Fundamentally, it represents a community-based approach to doping prevention. Moreover, one that respects

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the relational concerns associated with whistleblowing on doping behaviours exhibited here. Therefore, these findings serve to stimulate debate and discussion within anti-doping efforts regarding the possibility of confrontation being encouraged as an effective deterrent to doping in sport.

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